



Opening Texas and Our Economy

I hope everyone is staying safe and following social distancing guidelines. COVID-19 has shaken up our state and our nation, but Texas is resilient and we will get through this. As the situation continues to evolve, my office and I will continue to update my Facebook page as well as provide these e-mail updates to keep you all informed. I hope this update is helpful to you and that it answers any questions you may have about Governor Abbott's recent Executive Orders and the actions that are being taken to re-open Texas.

We must continue to work together to stop the spread of COVID-19 so please continue to follow the recommended proper hygiene protocols so that you and your family can stay healthy. As always, my staff and I are here to answer any questions you may have about the current situation in our state. Please feel free to give us a call at [512-463-0600](tel:512-463-0600), we are here for you.

If you would like to receive real-time updates from me and my team, especially now during this pandemic, please click the button below to follow along on Facebook.

Representative Ben Leman Facebook

Re-Opening Texas

On April 17th, Governor Abbott set the stage for the re-opening of Texas. On that day, he issued several Executive Orders, including one which established the *Strike Force to Open Texas*. This strike force is composed of a team of nationally recognized medical experts and private and public leaders who have advised the Governor on ways to safely and strategically re-open the State of Texas. With the guidance of this strike force, Governor Abbott announced [Executive Order GA-18](#) yesterday afternoon which details Texas' plan to re-open for business.

Governor Abbott's Executive Order which ordered Texans to stay at home, and was announced last month, will expire April 30th and will not be extended. The plan to re-open Texas will be made up of different phases that will be contingent on the containment of COVID-19. Phase 1 will begin Friday, May 1st and will allow the re-opening of retail stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and malls. These establishments are allowed to open so long as they limit their occupancy to no more than 25% of maximum capacity. Museums and libraries will be allowed to open as well with the same occupancy limits, but all interactive/hands on exhibits must remain closed. Governor Abbott's newest order also allows Texans to play outdoor sports so long as only four people are playing at one time and as long as social distancing guidelines are followed. Previously, Governor Abbott directed State Parks to re-open on April 20th with certain restrictions. These restrictions require anyone visiting a state park to wear a face covering, to maintain a distance of six feet from individuals outside of their party, and gatherings of more than five people are prohibited. If a business is worried about the health of their employees and wants to stay closed longer, they are able to do so seeing as this order does not require them to open but allows them to open if they wish. Governor Abbott mentioned that sole proprietors can safely return to work now.

Additionally, Governor Abbott issued [Executive Order GA-19](#), which will allow all licensed health care professionals to return to work on May 1st. This order supersedes the order he issued last week, GA-15, which only allowed medical professionals to perform certain medically necessary procedures. In accordance to this order all licensed health care professionals shall comply with any emergency rules promulgated by their respective licensing agencies dictating minimum standards for safe practice during the COVID- 19 disaster and hospitals must reserve 15% of their capacity for COVID-19 patients.

As was previously mentioned, this plan would not be a one size fits all and it would provide different guidelines for counties who do not have many cases of COVID-19. This is especially important for some of our rural counties who have not seen as many cases as our urban neighbors. With that being said, counties with 5 or fewer cases of COVID-19 may increase occupancy to no more than 50% of maximum capacity for the allowed business activities. These counties must still comply with all safety standards. If there is an increase in the number of cases in these counties, then they will have to revert to a smaller occupancy limit for the allowed business activities. Barbershops, hair salons, bars, and gyms, will remain closed but Governor Abbott hopes that they can re-open no later than mid-May. Nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities must remain closed to visitors unless to provide critical assistance.

If Texas is successful in containing the spread of COVID-19 during Phase 1, Phase 2 is projected to begin on May 18th. Phase 2 would increase occupancy capacity to 50%, but Texas will only move on to the second phase after the two weeks of data shows that there has not been an increase in hospitalization rates, there has not been an increase in deaths, and there are no new hotspots of the virus. All of these factors, along with many others, will be taken into consideration before moving on to the next phase. Therefore, it is important to remember that it is up to us to maintain social distancing guidelines and proper hygiene protocols because the faster we follow the rules, the faster we can move on to a different phase of this plan. While this plan does not require that you wear a face covering, Governor Abbott and his team strongly suggests that you do. Local jurisdictions cannot mandate that you wear a face covering or impose a fine for Texans who chose not to wear one. Abbott's order supersedes any other executive order in place by a local government and more information on his plan can be found [here](#).

Federal Response

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate passed another piece of legislation that will aid our economy during these troubling times. The \$484 billion bill will temporarily replenish about \$320 billion into the small business loan program, and another \$60 billion for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, which is a grant set up to serve as a company's life support while it awaits a larger small-business loan. Additionally, Congress appropriated \$75 billion to support hospitals and \$25 billion for additional coronavirus testing.

The bill was signed into law by President Trump on Friday, April 24th. This is the fourth measure that has been passed to combat the effects that COVID-19 has had on our nation's economy.

USDA Coronavirus Food Assistance Program

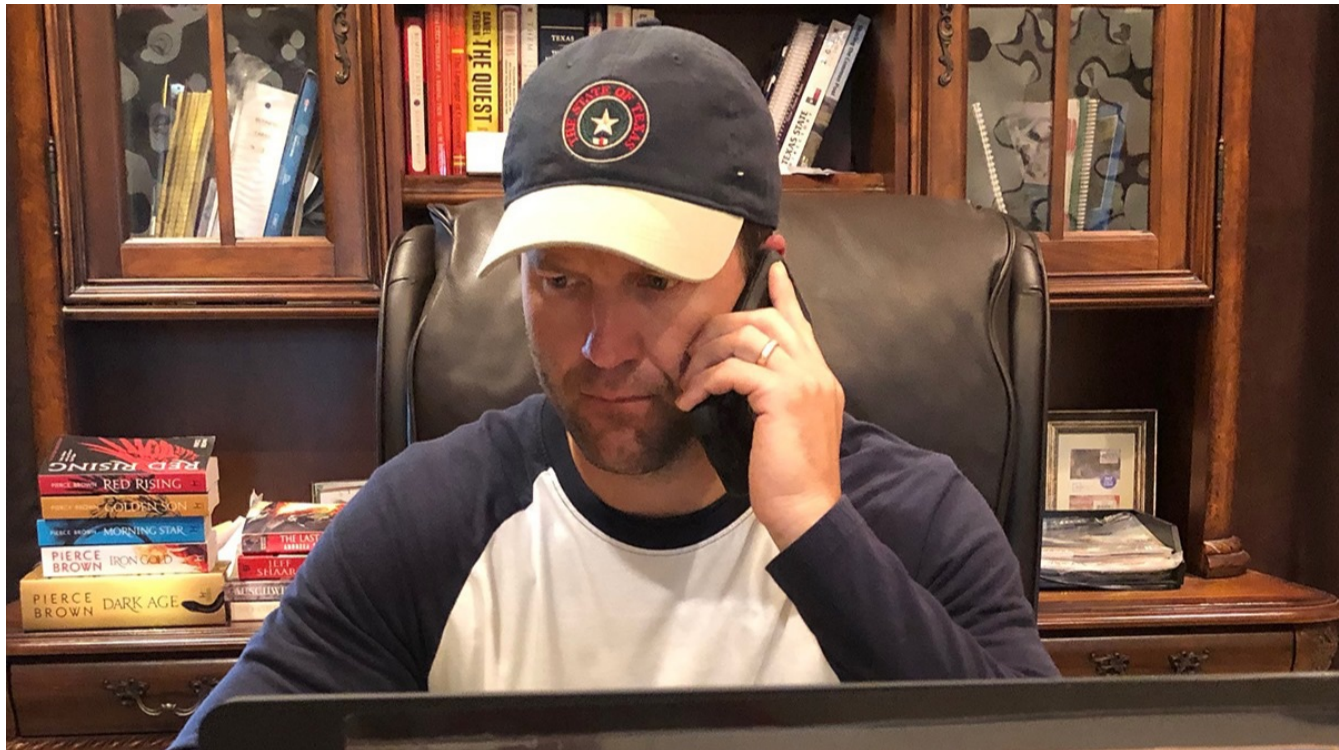
A couple of weeks ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the creation of a new program that will take several actions to assist farmers, ranchers, and consumers in response to the COVID-19 national emergency. The program, the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), was created at the direction of President Trump who asked the USDA to craft this \$19 billion immediate relief program to provide critical support to our farmers and ranchers, maintain the integrity of our food supply chain, and ensure every American continues to receive and have access to the food they need.

The program will use the funding and authorities provided in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and other USDA existing authorities. The program includes two major elements to achieve these goals:

1. **Direct Support to Farmers and Ranchers:** The program will provide \$16 billion in direct support based on actual losses for agricultural producers where prices and market supply chains have been impacted and will assist producers with additional adjustment and marketing costs resulting from lost demand and short-term oversupply for the 2020 marketing year caused by COVID-19.
2. **USDA Purchase and Distribution:** USDA will partner with regional and local distributors, whose workforce has been significantly impacted by the closure of many restaurants, hotels, and other food service entities, to purchase \$3 billion in fresh produce, dairy, and meat. We will begin with the procurement of an estimated \$100 million per month in fresh fruits and vegetables, \$100 million per month in a variety of dairy products, and \$100 million per month in meat products. The distributors and wholesalers will then provide a pre-approved box of fresh produce, dairy, and meat products to food banks, community and faith based organizations, and other non-profits serving Americans in need.

Further details regarding eligibility, rates, and other implementation will be released at a later date. More information can be found [here](#).

House District 13



We are going through some unprecedented times, but I want you to know that my staff and I are doing everything we can to ensure that everyone in House District 13 is being kept informed. My staff and I are working tirelessly to make sure that everyone's concerns are being addressed and please know that we hear you.

Over the last several weeks, I have been a part of numerous conference calls with state wide elected officials, community leaders, and state agencies. Likewise, I have spoken to many of you, all who have shared your concerns with this pandemic, and I have been able to relay your issues and input on these conference calls. These phone calls have been instrumental in the gathering and relaying of information from the front lines, which has enabled me to provide the most up to date information to the constituents of HD 13. Your input helps us all get an idea of what direction the state needs to take to combat this virus and it is greatly appreciated.

As your State Representative, I want to remind you that your opinion matters. Recently, I posted a question on my Facebook page in regards to the re-opening of Texas. I want to hear what you think about this! If you are on Facebook, please go to [this](#) post and tell me what your thoughts are. Do you think we should re-open the state for business? Should we be more aggressive opening up Texas for business or should we be more less aggressive?

Mobile District Office

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and out of an abundance of caution, our mobile district schedule has been suspended until further notice.

Thank you again for taking the time to read our updates. As always, if there is ever anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to contact me or a member of my staff.

Sincerely,



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State Representative
House District 13



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